

SHAKING THE EMPIRE

in Poland and Eastern Europe, it would have been challenging the status about the Bulgarian former communist

ned by the authors of the shooting with the pope and Polish authorities for months preceding the shooting was similar with the situation posed to communism. At the Soviets—either behind the assassination involvement is the risk: attempt, the diplomatic have been overwhelm- life, the Soviets were arity. No illuminating been found in either ough Western intelli- to the Kremlin might

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infiltrated the Italian secret services, which (at a time when they were obsessed with terrorist activity in Italy) failed spectacularly to note the presence of Agca—a known terrorist who had already threatened to kill the pope—in their country.

During his visit to his would-be assassin's cell in a Roman prison, the pope conversed with Agca in Italian for twenty minutes. As the audience ended, Agca knelt down and kissed the hand of John Paul II. Afterward, Agca said in interviews that "the pope knows everything." Few intelligence professionals believe that at the time of the assassination attempt Agca would have known the full extent of any conspiracy he was involved in—including the real identities of some of his alleged coconspirators, who worked at the Bulgarian embassy in Rome.

"Ali Agca," says the pope's spokesman, Dr. Joaquín Navarro-Valls, "knows only up to a certain level. On a higher level he doesn't know anything. If there was a conspiracy, it was done by professionals and professionals don't leave traces. One will never find anything."

Though papal aides are loath to discuss this, John Paul II may harbor the deep suspicion that Muslim radicals were responsible for his shooting, or at least that Agca was acting on behalf of an Islamic cause. In private, Wojtyła is hostile to certain aspects of Islam, particularly as interpreted by those he considers radical Muslims. Part of his hostility stems from his belief that the Qur'an condones violence. The shooting of the pope, say some close associates, left its mark on him. Apart from a legacy of sheer physical and mental pain, he continued for many months to ponder the mystery of the act that was meant to kill him, knowing he could be a target again.

Agca's own contradictory confessions and rantings have at various times laid the blame at the door of both the Bulgarian government and an Islamic conspiracy. (He has also claimed to be Jesus Christ.) But Italian investigators insist his actions have been lucid and rational throughout and that his various statements and attitudes, however bizarre they may seem, have often had ulterior motives. Among other things, they may be attempts to send different signals to his possible coconspirators.

THIS QUOTE
COULD APPLY TO THE RAY CASE.

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FROM HIS HOLINESS BY BERNSTEIN